



Let's Move in Indian Country (LMIC)

In the recently-published report to President Barack Obama on “Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity within a Generation,” the susceptibility of Native American/Alaskan Native children to childhood obesity and related diseases, such as juvenile diabetes, is given special attention. A study of four year-olds found that obesity is more than two times more common among Native American/Alaskan Native children (31%) than among white (16%) or Asian (13%) children. This rate is higher than any other racial or ethnic group studied. In 2002, more than 100,000 Native American and Alaskan Native adults, or nearly 15 percent of those receiving care from the Indian Health Service (IHS) were estimated to have diabetes.

Indian country comes in various forms, from rural reservation communities to urban dwellers and remote Alaskan villages to Oklahoma's Tribal areas. Elected Tribal leaders and other community leaders such as school officials and urban center coordinators have the ability to spur action in the areas of health, wellness, nutrition and physical activity. Throughout our country's history, Native communities have provided some of the best examples of healthy food and sustainable community-based practices and many groups in Indian country are continuing to lead by example by following traditional paths that have existed long before the country was born.

Given the magnitude of the crisis, an interagency collaboration between the First Lady's *Let's Move!* Initiative, the Departments of the Interior (AS-IA, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Bureau of Indian Education), Agriculture, and Health and Human Services (IHS) to reduce disproportionately high obesity rates and improve the health of Native youth has been formed. Through concrete policy changes called for in the President's Childhood Obesity Task Force Report targeted actions will be taken to improve access to healthier foods and increase physical activity in BIE and public schools as well as addressing prenatal and very early childhood care in the IHS hospital system.

Our goals for Let's Move Indian Country are as follows:

1. *Creating a Healthy Start on Life*
 - a. *Certify 14 (All Federally-Run) IHS Obstetrics Facilities as Baby Friendly Hospitals by 2012*
2. *Providing a Healthy School Environment*
 - a. *Certify 5 new schools serving high populations of Native youth as Healthier US Schools by 2012*
 - b. *Support 100 new schools that are accessing any Food and Nutrition Services programs, including Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Child and Adult Care Feeding Program or Summer Food Service.*
 - c. *Support school transformation efforts at 5 pilot schools in the Bureau of Indian Education*

- d. *Develop 50 school/community gardens throughout Indian Country utilizing USDA programs or Technical Assistance*
3. *Increasing Physical Activity*
 - a. *Engage 25,000 people in Indian Country in the President's Active Lifestyle Award (PALA) program by 2012.*
4. *Creating Healthy, Comprehensive Food Systems Policies*
 - a. *Establish 20 food policy councils/committees in communities across Indian Country.*

Government alone will not be able to solve this problem, we need your help, expertise, and commitment on the ground. This movement looks to recognize the already existing efforts in Indian country and then identify areas where public/private sector partnerships can support. Let's Move in Indian Country recognizes the inherent sovereignty of each of these communities and wishes to work with each individual community to reduce childhood obesity and health related illnesses. Here are some existing programs and resources that individuals and communities can access to begin or enhance their work toward the goal of ending childhood obesity within a generation.

STEP 1: Create a Healthy Start on Life for Children;

Child development and habits do not begin when they enter school, they begin at birth. It is important for local community leaders to engage their health care professionals to ensure the proper support is given to children to support their early development.

Ideas for a Healthier Start

- *Baby Friendly and Parenting Support:* The [BFHI](#) assists hospitals in giving mothers the information, confidence, and skills needed to successfully initiate and continue breastfeeding their babies or feeding formula safely, and gives special recognition to hospitals that have done so.
- *Creating Safety net from Hospitals to Home:* The Food and Nutrition Service provides nutrition programs that can offset family budgets and leaders can help families access programs like the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (SNAP) and [Women, Infants and Children](#) (WIC). Tribal elected officials can also designate an Indian Tribal Organization to operate the [Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations](#) (FDPIR), which provides commodity foods to low-income households, as an alternative to SNAP benefits.
- *Special Diabetes Program for Indians:* The [Special Diabetes Program for Indians \(SDPI\)](#) provides funding for diabetes treatment and prevention services at 399 IHS, Tribal, and Urban Indian health programs across the United States.
- *Support Early Head Start Programs:* [Early Head Start \(EHS\)](#) is a community-based program for low-income families with infants and toddlers and pregnant women. Its mission is simple to promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women, to enhance the development of very young children, and to promote healthy family functioning.
- *Food Insecurity:* Access to healthy food in your community can be assisted through the development of your local food infrastructure with things such as the [Healthy Food Financing Initiative](#) (HFFI).

STEP 2: Creating Healthier Schools;

The majority of young people's caloric intake happens before, during, and after the formal school day as part of school meal programs. Let's Move Indian Country has set a goal of certifying 250 *schools serving high populations of Native youth to meet the HealthierUS School Challenge criteria by 2012*. While only 7% of Native American students attend BIE funded or BIE run schools, we can effectively reach the other 93% by better targeting our HealthierUS Schools outreach efforts to target those school districts with majority Native American populations. Additional outreach can be done to include culturally appropriate resources including those that promote traditional foods.

Ideas for Healthier Food in Schools

Tribal leaders and school officials can assist schools and afterschool programs in providing improved nutritional meals through some basic steps.

- *Healthier US Schools Challenge*: Identify strategies to support local schools in the [HealthierUS School Challenge](#). The Challenge recognizes schools that take specific steps to improve their school environment by serving healthy foods, and by providing nutrition education and physical education.
- *National School Lunch Program*: Encourage families to enroll their children in school meal programs. Please call the National Hunger Hotline at 1-866-3-HUNGRY for more information.
- *Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program*: Assist your local school in applying for the [Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program](#), which provides free fresh fruits and vegetables in selected low-income elementary schools nationwide.
- *Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP)*: Each day, 3.2 million children receive nutritious meals and snacks through the [Child and Adult Care Feeding Program](#) (CACFP). The program can also provide meals and snacks to 112,000 adults who receive care in nonresidential adult day care centers.
- *Summer Food Service*: Operate a [Summer Food Service Program](#) in partnership with local schools.
- *BackPack Program*: Partner with your local food banks to support the local [BackPack Program](#), a program designed to meet the needs of hungry children at times when other resources are not available, like over weekends and during summer vacation.
- *Connect with Farm to School*: Utilize the National [Farm to School](#) Network which helps to develop community-based food systems that can enhance local Tribal producers by assisting them in accessing the local food procurement system.
- *Corporation for National Community Service (CNCS)*: Help your school and other local agencies utilize CNCS programs such as [AmeriCorps Vista](#) and [Senior Corps](#) to provide community service assistance.

STEP 3: Ensure access to healthy, affordable, and where possible, traditional food

It seems simple but it is extremely important to understand that eating healthy can be compromised if nutritional food is unavailable. Many remote Native communities are considered to be "food deserts", which is counterintuitive with those communities' economies being agriculturally driven. It is important for your communities to support healthy food production and locally grown food, so that nutritional food is available to your community.

Ideas to support healthy and traditional foods

- *Support Existing and Beginning Farmers:* Healthy food does not make itself, but is produced by local farmer and ranchers. Many Tribal communities support Tribally owned agricultural enterprises or Tribal producers because their success is ultimately valuable for the entire community. The United States Department of Agriculture has programs to help your community in providing assistance to these agriculture producers. Together the [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Grant Program](#) and the [2501 Grant Program for Socially Disadvantaged Producers](#) can assist through competitive grants in providing assistance to producers to ensure that healthy food is not only available but also grown in your community.
- *Capture and Utilize Traditional Knowledge:* The history of agriculture in this country began well before its formation in places like the cornfields of the Southwest and the ricing lakes in the Upper Midwest. Many Tribal leaders are utilizing various programs to connect their communities to traditional knowledge of food and agriculture such as HHS' [Social and Economic Development Strategies Program](#) and [CDC's](#). One extremely important piece to this collective action is the gathering of Native seeds in Tribal seed banks which can be assisted through programs such as IHS' [Special Diabetes Program for Indians](#).
- *Start a Farmer's Market:* Coordinate local producers and utilize USDA programs to start a market. The [Farmer's Market Promotion Program](#) can assist in this development which can include the ability to accept SNAP benefits.
- *School /Community Garden Development:* School gardens are places that provide the chance for physical activity and educational opportunities. Many Tribal organizations also connect this activity with the teaching of traditional cultural knowledge around food and agriculture.
- *Organize a Food Pantry:* Partner with your local food bank to host a food pantry at your organization or congregation with healthy options. Visit [Feeding America](#) to find the food bank closest to you.

STEP 4: Increase opportunities for physical activity

Children need increased physical education, safe routes to walk and ride their bikes to school, and access to parks, playgrounds and community centers to get the 60 minutes of active play they need each day. Sports leagues and dance and fitness programs that are exciting and challenging will keep children engaged. Tribal leaders and Urban Indian Centers can take steps to increase opportunities for kids to be physically active – in school and in their communities – and create opportunities for families to engage in physical activity together.

Ideas to support increased activity

- *President's Active Lifestyle Challenge:* Participate, and encourage other schools, groups and organizations to participate, in the Presidential Active Lifestyle Award program.
- *Let's Get Moving:* Connect your community with Let's Move Outside to find local outdoor parks, events and programs.
- *Safe Routes to Schools:* This program enables communities to improve safety and encourage more children to safely walk and bicycle to school. You can work with your state to access various

Department of Transportation funds that encourage safe a physically active ways for students to get to schools.

- *Carol M. White Physical Education Program:* This program can be used to provide equipment and support to enable students to participate actively in physical education activities.
- *Update Physical Education Programs and Increased engagement with partners to help meet PALA challenge goals* with attention paid to content (including traditional activities), frequency and duration to help supplement physical education programming in schools and communities. . (Notah Begay Foundation, Myron Rolle Foundation, Coach Across America, Urban Lacrosse, Healthier Lifestyles Initiative)
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STEP 5: Develop a Food Policy Council/Committee

Food Policy Councils convene various stakeholders and elected officials for the purpose of providing a comprehensive examination of a local food system. A variety of community leaders can be used to analyze how food is grown or brought into their local community. Not only can these groups analyze the existing local food system, but this can also be used as a tool by the community to reconnect with traditional practices and foods. USDA's [Community Food Project](#) can assist Food Policy Councils in these creative approaches to meeting the local food needs.

- A food policy council is an officially sanctioned body of representatives from various segments of a state or local food system, and selected public officials, asked to examine the operation of a local food system, and provide ideas or recommendations for how it can be improved. A council initiative tries to engage representatives from all components of the food system
- Your community can utilize the Food Policy Council to connect agricultural production to the food on your plates!
- With buy in from certain stakeholders you can provide input on food purchasing decisions that affect your community.
- Food Policy Councils can provide important information to their elected officials by gathering specific knowledge from the community about the food system.
- Your group can answer questions like how did this food get to our community and why do we eat what we do?
- The group can include elected officials, farmers, retailers, school leaders, cultural leaders and anyone else who you deem a stakeholder in your food system.
- It is up to your elected officials to take action forming a Food Policy Council/Committee.